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A NOTE ON SYRIA, THE SUDAN, AND THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC

A Summary of Recent Trends and Developments

by Alan W. Horton

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The relations of Arabs to each other and to the rest of the world, in the words of a bemused Western diplomat, "seem to go on and on." The diplomat was doubtless feeling the strain of long experience in Arab affairs—not only the normal maintenance work necessary to good relations with his own country but also the unremitting exertions required for understanding the complicated rhythms of like and dislike among the Arabs themselves—and with suggestively similar crises at almost rhythmic intervals over the years, he could be forgiven his weary view that Arab politics had become somewhat monotonous. _Plus ça change_. . . .

Yet things are never, of course, quite the same as they were. The world context in which Arabs are now operating is not that of a few years ago, and as the nature and structure of the cold war have changed, Arab relations with both the East and the West have become more complicated and, in some instances, less successful. And Arabs themselves are changing: they are becoming more involved in the Western-inspired global culture that is spreading so rapidly, and they are, at the same time, evolving in their own separate ways. Many have become more conscious of themselves as Arabs—and hence more ultimately amenable, one supposes, to some form of Arab unity—but the operative political unit continues to be the state; and each Arab state, though in some ways it may encourage its citizens to believe in the single Arab nation that is yet to be achieved, has been developing loyalties to itself and encouraging its own emergence as a true nation. Thus, despite the communications revolutions that is making Arabs increasingly responsive to each other and to the outside world, the significant changes of the area are coming from the separate evolutions of each Arab polity.

Still, the ideal of Arab unity should not be discounted. In a few Arab states, such as the Sudan, it may require only occasional public

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mention; in others, such as Syria and Jordan, it can be a political force that politicians ignore at their peril. However, all Arab states—even the Sudan—find themselves obliged to respond in some way to calls for greater unity, and the ideal of unity is the principal ingredient of the political mortar that holds inter-Arab structures together. At times of intervention or pressure from outside—particularly from the West and Israel—the call to greater unity is politically irresistible, and each Arab state must adapt its actions and plans accordingly and draw what profit it can from the situation's new requirements. Over the last two years, such a situation has been of major interest to observers: no Arab state could resist the call to the summit conferences of 1964, which were called to deal with an Israeli plan for diversion of the waters of the Jordan River—and to deal also with a Syrian threat of unilateral action, an impractical belligerence that might embroil other Arabs as well.[1] At the conferences, the ideal of unity was served by the adoption of joint plans for counterdiversion of the Jordan waters and by the establishment of a Unified Arab Command that would undertake to protect vulnerable Arab states from Israeli retaliation. And following the lead of Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser, whose belief in Arab revolution by subversion of other Arab states had already undergone public revision, Arab governments hailed the emergence of a new climate of co-operation and understanding among them.

The more important work of the summit conferences, however, had to do with the less collective aspects of Arab relations. In implicit recognition that membership in the larger Arab nation does not provide for the satisfaction of everyday political needs and that the state remains the operative unit, the conferences even created a "Palestine Entity," a new "state" to provide a paper focus for the special aspirations of Palestinians exiled to other Arab lands. Each Arab government, pursuing its particularized interests at a time of flux, used the conferences—and the lesser meetings incidental to them—for reassessment of its Arab policy, for conciliatory or frank talk in keeping with the new Nasser-made climate, and though no new alignments have appeared since the first summit, some interesting shifts in the quality of bilateral relationships have been discernible.

It is often said that the relations of Iraq, Egypt, and Syria determine the shape of Arab politics. A rapprochement between Iraq

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[1] See Alan W. Horton, The Arab Summit of January 1964 (AWH-1-'64), American Universities Field Staff Reports, Northeast Africa Series, Volume XI, No. 1, February 1964.

and the United Arab Republic occurred just after the fall from power of the Iraqi Baath and prior to the first summit of January 1964; and it was this sudden understanding between traditional rivals that permitted the U.A.R. to issue the call to a summit without fear of corporate Iraqi-Syrian hostility, which had only recently been the case. After the first summit, the Iraqi-Egyptian rapprochement even led to serious-sounding conversations about unity, but though the sound was sometimes serious, the intent has all along been little more than to establish a mutually convenient common front against other Arab states—especially against Baathist Syria. Now that the convenience is less, and the Iraqis are less fearful of the Baath, the two states' periodic bows to unity have become somewhat stilted. Despite Egyptian efforts, including the presence of a few U.A.R. troops near Baghdad and attempts to mediate between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish rebels in the north, Iraq is an unstable ally; and what will happen to the relationship after Baghdad's next coup—which will probably occur sooner rather than later—is problematic: the best guesswork is that Iraq will remain non-Baathist and essentially military, but much less interested in gearing its revolutionary concepts to those of the U.A.R.

Syria, on the other hand, has developed a relatively stable polity over the last two years, but a close bilateral relation with the U.A.R. is quite out of the question. Though it espouses revolutionary concepts that are almost identical to those of the U.A.R., Syria's ruling Baath party bitterly remembers the treatment it received during the three-year union and continues to consider itself the U.A.R.'s principal rival for leadership of the Arab revolution. As a rival to Nassar, however, the Baath has clearly come off second best: at the time of the first summit in January 1964, the Egyptian leader firmly and deftly placed the cloak of isolation on Syria's shoulders, and though now less thorough, the isolation remains by and large what Nassar wishes it to be. With its emerging domestic stability, the Syrian Baath has begun to wear the cloak of isolation as if it were a mantle of some distinction, and in recognition of this new situation, the U.A.R. and Iraq, after an unsuccessful war of words (and perhaps bribes), have not only abandoned their efforts at toppling the Baath from power, but the U.A.R. is even working toward the establishment of a distant but definite modus vivendi with the Damascus government.

Of all Arab states, Jordan has perhaps gained most from the climate of the summits. Nasser's policy shift, his new view that some Arab states are not ready for Arab revolution, has considerably lightened the political load carried by King Hussein, whose more-than-several educated subjects are often Nasserite and tolerate their king to

the degree that he is tolerated by Cairo. The price of Jordanian co-operation with the U.A.R. at the first summit was public reconciliation with the Egyptian leader and cessation of Egypt's subversive broadcasts on Voice of the Arabs; and because Hussein has kept his basic anti-Baathism in good repair, has remained neutral in Nasser's dispute with Saudi Arabia over the future of Yemen, and has in other ways refrained from criticism, he has been enabled to proceed to greater effect with the job of development that may even make his country economically viable. As things now stand, Jordan, like Kuwait and other nonsocialist developing states, must proclaim itself neutralist in foreign policy, but it depends on "imperialist" powers—principally the United States and Great Britain—for the basic infusions of capital it needs.

Some observers maintain that the principal reason for Nasser's call to the first summit was the necessity of finding a solution for the problem of Yemen, a usually unimportant Arab corner that is now the scene of confrontation between the U.A.R. and Saudi Arabia. If only to alleviate its desperate balance-of-payments situation, the U.A.R. is urgently anxious to withdraw the more than 50,000 Egyptian troops that have been keeping the republican regime in power, and Faisal, whose grip on the Saudi kingdom has now been ratified by his ascension of the throne, will not agree to stop giving aid to the royalists before being certain that no revolutionary Egyptian beachhead remains on the Arabian peninsula. The summit conferences have produced a measure of sweet words between the two countries, but Nasser greatly fears a loss of face, and Faisal, a shrewd antagonist who realizes that time is on his side, is in like manner not disposed to come to terms. One difficulty is that the Yemeni confrontation has taken on some aspects of a symbolic struggle: revolution versus tradition, socialism versus capitalism, modernism versus tribalism, and so on. The United States, whose Arab policy is such that it maintains a special interest in both countries, deserves considerable credit for the balancing act that has allowed it to keep the confrontation out of the framework of the cold war. Close observers—and there are not many of these—say that the ultimate solution must come from the Yemenis themselves, who are increasingly disposed to decree plagues on all non-Yemeni houses using Yemen's terraced land to fight irrelevant Arab battles. A recent ray of hope was the formation of a Yemeni government whose announced aim was the conciliation of Yemen's tribal and religious factions and whose impetus—and this was understood in Egypt—came from a keen Yemeni desire for the withdrawal of all Egyptian troops; but, most unfortunately, this government has just been ousted by a militant army faction. The ultimate solution cannot be Egyptian, nor can it be royalist, but the summit climate has not yet fostered true compromise.

The Arab states are now climbing down from the summit, most of them quietly, one or two with noisy disregard for sensibilities. Most are agreed that an abrupt renewal of inter-Arab invective would leave an unfortunate international impression; and as inter-Arab tensions reassert themselves, they continue their lip service to Arab "togetherness" and collective action against Israel. But it is clear to all that the summit climate is slowly clouding over. One reason is that summitry's initiating and leading spirit, President Nasser, now judges it to be less helpful: two summits and many mediators have all failed to bring agreement with Saudi Arabia and to extricate Nasser from the intricate problem of Yemen. Then, too, whereas rash Syrian belligerence toward Israel could be contained at the first summit by the establishment of a United Arab Command and by other collective pressures, Syria's increasing internal stability has made its belligerence less necessary to itself—and its politicians less susceptible to outside Arab influences. The counterdiversionary works planned for the Jordan River, many have noted, are almost as mild in their intent as the Israeli plans that prompted them; the only true casus belli—the only part of any proposal, in fact, that departs from the American scheme approved at the technical level by Arabs and Israelis a decade ago—would be the execution of announced plans to divert the waters of important Jordan tributaries to courses that bypass Israel. But even the most hopeful Arab nationalists are now admitting the failure of collective action. Neither Syria nor Lebanon, on both of which the plans depend, has shown itself willing to have other than its own troops stationed on its soil, and neither country can offer serious resistance to Israeli attack. Syria began moving earth early in 1965, but in the course of a border "incident," the Israelis destroyed the earth-moving equipment—and, at this writing, work has not been resumed. Lebanon, despite pressures from other members of the Arab League and from nationalist sections of its own electorate, will—it is now assumed—somehow manage to avoid the provocation of making a serious start on the Hasbani River project. With the probability, therefore, that neither diversionary nor counterdiversionary activity will violate the still important American proposal of 1954, the Unified Arab Command's defensive arrangements, whose principal significance is in the event of a major Israeli thrust, have taken on less importance—and so, accordingly, have summit conferences. The third conference, which is still scheduled for Morocco in September 1965, may yet be held; but, if so, it begins to look as if persons other than heads of state will be representing their countries at something less than summit level.

The difficulties of Arab summitry have been demonstrated by the untidy occurrences of recent Arab-German relations. At the heart of these complex and hopelessly entangled chains of events were the

attitudes that govern the relations between West and East Germany and between Israel and the Arab states—as well as German guilt feelings toward the Jews and Arab neuroses about the developed world. In the summer of 1964, the Arabs suddenly learned that what had been considered a routine sale of arms by West Germany to Israel did, in fact, include some 200 tanks—and this with American approval because they had originally been part of an American-German agreement. This bit of intelligence set in motion a political wheel that eventually spun off its axis and caromed into several unexpected corners of world politics. More expectably, though still surprisingly, it led also to the cessation of arms sales to Israel by West Germany, the establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and West Germany, and a direct challenge by the U.A.R. to West Germany's Hallstein doctrine, which asserts that West Germany will not have—with the exception of the Soviet Union—diplomatic relations with any state that recognizes East Germany. The challenge came in the form of an Egyptian invitation to the East German head of state (did such a visit constitute recognition?), but after it was clear that other Arab states were inclined to support the U.A.R. and to be impatient with this kind of diplomatic comedy, the West Germans decided to pretend that no recognition had occurred. When it came out, however, that West Germany was seeking to establish relations with Israel, the Arab reaction—there was no sense of comedy now—was less corporate. Nasser made every retaliatory effort to organize a joint Arab recognition of East Germany; but the summit climate was far from sunny enough to bring about such a departure, and the only solid support the Egyptian president could muster was that of Iraq and Yemen. Meanwhile, West Germany had made it plain that in its view the formal recognition of East Germany was a matter vastly different from the mere withdrawal of recognition from West Germany, and let it be known that the latter arrangement, though unfortunate, was understandable and need mean neither the cessation of West German economic assistance nor the recall of technicians.

Tunisia's President Habib Bourguiba chose this moment to proclaim loudly and publicly that the Arab position on Israel was now out of date and should be realistically reassessed, and even Ben Bella of Algeria, Nasser's ally and friend, who has now been ousted, reacted to pressures from West Germany's Common Market partners and heeded the talk of those Algerians who do not consider Israel a basic Algerian concern. References to possible recognition of East Germany began to disappear from the Cairo press, and the ensuing retreat from a strong nationalist position gave further impetus to the idea that summitry was approaching bankruptcy. When some Arab states did finally make the gesture of withdrawing recognition from West Germany, with-

out an equal and opposite gesture toward East Germany, the atmosphere of friendly understanding was unmistakable. In Cairo, where domestic issues were now crowding the newspaper columns, the few departing German diplomats (most stayed on in the U.A.R. in technical or cultural capacities) were given every facility, including the privilege of delaying departure in order to coincide with the end of the school year.

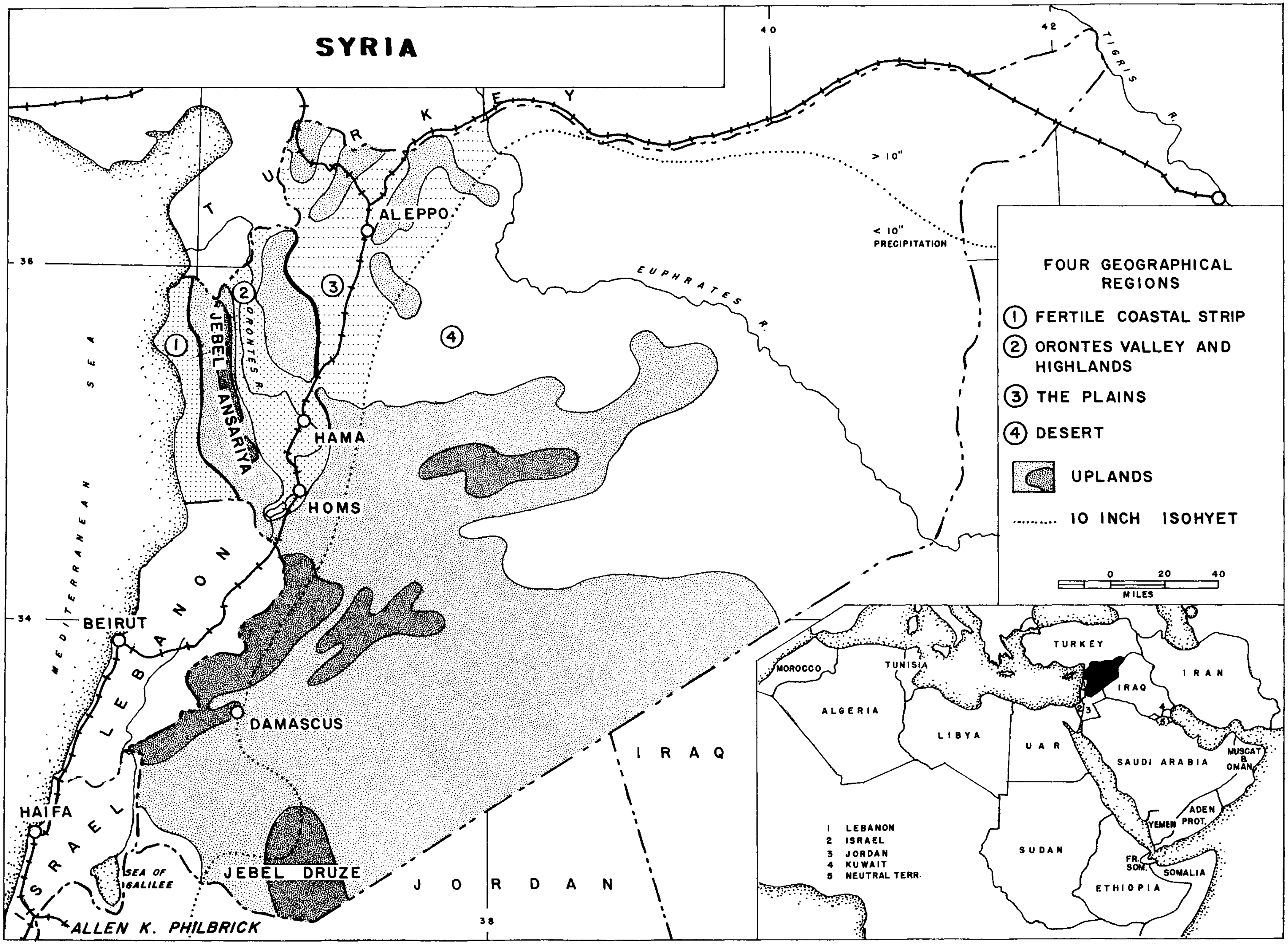
Arab summitry, by definition, must be a sometime thing: the view from the summit is exhilarating, but no Arab state can stay up for very long—unless, as with the U.A.R.'s difficulties over Yemen, there are pressing domestic illnesses for which summit air may provide a specific cure. A momentary satisfaction of the unity urge can be achieved at the top, but because summitry is based on no more than a willingness to co-operate, each state soon begins the descent to the lesser altitutdes of primary concerns. These are the altitudes of effective government and state enterprise, and the concern has to do with economic and social development—and with political identity. For despite the urge toward Arab unity, each Arab state has tacitly accepted the proposition that the state performs better and develops faster when its borders describe the overriding loyalty of its citizens. As the idea of a greater Arab nation increasingly takes on the function of unattainable ideal, the states proceed on their own with the tricky job of building nations in the Arab context. What follow are recent excerpts of nation-building significance from the state histories of Syria, the United Arab Republic, and the Sudan.[2]

Syria

Popularly known as the Baath, the Arab Socialist Resurrection party prides itself on its Arab outreach, although the only Arab state in which it now holds power is Syria. There are Baathist cells in some other Arab states—certainly in Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, and Iraq—but in only one of these has the Baath ever been in control. For some nine months a Baathist ministry governed Iraq, but it was overthrown in November 1963, and since that time, Syria has increasingly become Baathism's "mother country."

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[2] For the basic cultural and geographical data on Syria and the United Arab Republic, see Alan W. Horton, A Note on Syria and the United Arab Republic (AWH-1-'62), American Universities Field Staff Reports, Volume IX, No. 1, April 1962, and P.M. Holt, A Modern History of the Sudan (New York: Grove Press, 1961), pp. 3-15.


SYRIA
TURKEY
ALEPPO
HAMA
HOMS
BEIRUT
DAMASCUS
HAIFA
JEBEL ANSARIYA
JEBEL DRUZE
ORONTES R.
EUPHRATES R.
TIGRIS R.
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
LEBANON
ISRAEL
JORDAN
IRAQ
SEA OF GALILEE
> 10"
< 10" PRECIPITATION
36
34
38
40
42
FOUR GEOGRAPHICAL REGIONS
1 FERTILE COASTAL STRIP
2 ORONTES VALLEY AND HIGHLANDS
3 THE PLAINS
4 DESERT
UPLANDS
10 INCH ISOHYET
0 20 40
MILES
MOROCCO
ALGERIA
TUNISIA
LIBYA
U A R
TURKEY
IRAQ
IRAN
SAUDI ARABIA
MUSCAT & OMAN
ADEN PROT.
YEMEN
SUDAN
ETHIOPIA
FR. SOM.
SOMALIA
1 LEBANON
2 ISRAEL
3 JORDAN
4 KUWAIT
5 NEUTRAL TERR.
ALLEN K. PHILBRICK

By its own reckoning at least, the Baath has done remarkably well in Syria. Starting with a coup in March 1963, it has brought to Syria a measure of stability that exceeds that of any regime since the French mandate. Its principal method has been to institutionalize its relations with the army, which formerly was interfering but irresponsible, by providing officers with a regular channel for political expression, a channel in the form of a political organization (for officers only) that functions simultaneously as the Baathist faction inside the army and as the only political wing of the officer corps—other political groups within the corps having been carefully eliminated in various ways. Hence, Syria is ruled by Baathist officers and Baathist civilians, who have negotiated their relations with each other at the various levels of state and party authority. If officers have greater power than their civilian counterparts, both branches of the party are vital to party success; both know that neither could govern without the other.[3]

Stability, however, has a price: Syria is becoming a one-party state. The Baath has closed down all national newspapers except its own two party organs, and other political parties have been banned. The merchant class of Damascus and Aleppo, the backbone of Syrian conservatism, has lost the will to resist: the last merchant challenge and attempt to influence a policy by closing shutters and bringing commercial life to a standstill ended abruptly when a few shops were pried open and confiscated. The Baath's Nasserite opposition, by virtue of bad management and inexpert political maneuvering, has been identified and removed from positions of importance—and Nasserite officers have been purged from the officer corps. In the meantime, the Baath is energetically, and without opposition, engaged in political organizing, including considerable activity at the village level, so that the larger villages already have convinced villagers running party "reading rooms."

Though the Baath has brought stability, it is dedicated to social and economic change. The combination of stability and change, of power and program, is made possible by the fact that the sweeping generalities of Baathist ideology, by design or by chance, express a consensus about what Syria ought to become. Thus, the Baath's solutions for the country's social and economic ills bear a generally socialist label, and most educated younger men, military or civilian, would agree that this is the proper political direction for Syria. Those disagreeing with socialist

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[3] See Alan W. Horton, Syrian Stability and the Baath (AWH-1-'65), American Universities Field Staff Reports, Volume XIV, No. 1, April 1965.

solutions—the landlords whose power is waning because of land reform laws and the merchants who are transferring capital to Lebanon in the expectation of greater state control of the economy—have little influence left; and despite the fact that the economic importance of these two groups remains considerable in this transition period, the Baath views them as relics of an imperialist-feudalist past, from which revolutionary Syria must now dissociate itself.

A consensus on socialism is possible because, to most modern Syrians, socialism is less a doctrine than a vague ideal, a promise to control the state in the name of social justice and to put an end to the huge economic and social gaps between the rich and poor. In so far as it connotes revolution, anticapitalism, and other defiances, socialism has the further virtue of placing its supporters firmly on the side of those seeking independence of the West—an emotionally satisfying and politically convenient position to be in. The actual shape of Syrian (Baathist) socialism, however, is not yet clear. The government has taken over the banks and the insurance companies, the implementation of land reform laws is proceeding rapidly, and the large industrial concerns—there are not many of these in predominantly agricultural Syria—have, like the banks, been taken into the public sector; but though the Baath has begun the job of dismantling one economic system, the new one to replace it cannot yet be described. Will the government be concerned only with the economy's "commanding heights"? Will it attempt to establish a large but decentralized public sector? Or will it try the politically tempting game of centralizing a large public sector in Damascus? The Baath's doctrinaires—older rather than younger, civilian rather than military—would prefer centralization; but there are already signs that the doctrinaires will not have things all their way, and some younger Baathists are even beginning to insist that important kinds of private initiative should be fostered. Perhaps some examination of recent economic history is occurring: prior to the union with Egypt in 1958, the Syrian economy was doing remarkably well at the hands of entrepreneurs who were competently developing the country's agricultural potential, and though no return to this kind of freewheeling private enterprise is politically possible, there are obvious lessons for that growing group of Baathists whose judgments are more pragmatic. Though the atmosphere of Baathist conversation can still be exasperatingly doctrinaire, one now hears less talk of socialism for its own sake and more of socialism for the sake of development.

The Baath also believes in Arab unity, even if its present beliefs in federalist forms of unity fall far short of the wholehearted protestations of yesteryear. To most Syrians, the federalist principle

does not make the party less attractive—and here again the Baath expresses a consensus. The experience of full unity with Egypt was, except for the ardent Nasserites, traumatic; and the cultural and social arrogance of many Egyptians who lived in Syria during the union will not be soon forgotten. After the coup that brought it to power in 1963, the Baath took part in discussions with Egypt about the re-establishment of a greater political entity—at a critical and exciting juncture the two countries were joined by Iraq, which had just had a pro-Baathist coup of its own—but the discussions kept foundering on the federalist issue. Egypt insisted on a one-party system, and an Egyptian party; the others, while agreeing to the primacy of Egypt and the presidency of Nasser, maintained that the Baath should be the instrument of Arab revolution in Syria and Iraq. With the withdrawal of Egypt from the unity talks, the two Baathist countries proceeded with their own plans, but these were cut short when the Iraqi Baath was ousted by the army in November 1963. Since then, Syria and the Baath have been in a state of Arab isolation, and in the view of one long-time observer, "the result has been a faster development of Syrianism."

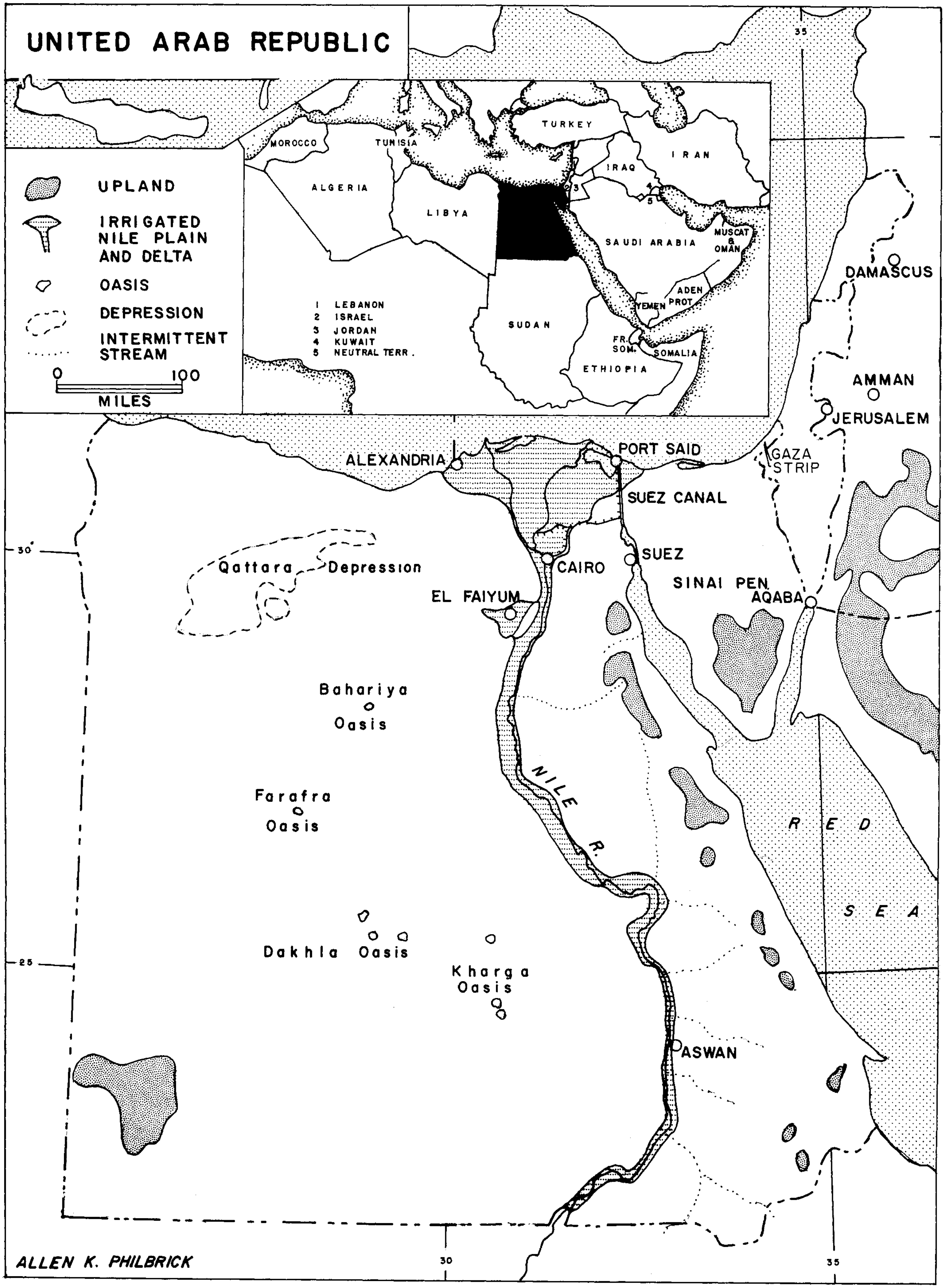
Baathist ideology also expresses a consensus about relations with the non-Arab world generally—and particularly, because of history's psychological requirements, with the West. In most respects, the Baath's neutralism is of the normal variety that aims at development assistance from almost every quarter and reacts against outside interference, real or imagined. Both the East and the West are in process of granting various kinds of aid, though Baathists and other Syrians, still obsessed by relations with Egypt—which has been enormously successful in obtaining outside assistance—are inclined to feel they are not receiving their fair share. The fact is that the Baath, in its isolation and brooding doctrinalism, has rendered Syria less important in Arab politics—and hence less important in the global framework of international attention.

Even so, Russian and Bulgarian and Czech projects are under way, as are French and American and West German projects of lesser import. But relations with these countries—with the United States and West Germany in particular—are plagued by the constant intrusion of the Baathist psyche, which appears to demand fulsome affection in the form of admiring words and major projects, while attributing lesser treatment to harmful intent. Before the recent interruption of diplomatic relations between Damascus and Bonn, Syria was anxious for West German assistance in its huge dam project on the Euphrates River, and German hesitations—granted they have not always been easily explainable—have been attributed by Baathists to various overimaginative plots of mutually inconsistent sorts. In its rela-

tions with the United States, too, the Baath has baffled even veteran diplomats: an unreasonable and impassioned anti-American press campaign has now continued for months and (despite a spy incident that followed by some weeks the campaign's beginnings) seems to have no basis in reality—beyond the psychological reality of what is occurring in Baathist minds. When asked about the reasons for the coldness of relations between the two countries, Baathists react most revealingly. Instead of listing American sins of commission and omission against Syria, they list what they consider to be their own sins against the United States (they are convinced that Baath socialism is somehow anti-American) and adduce these in support of their contention that the United States dislikes the Baath and is solely responsible for the diplomatic chill. The fact is that the United States has done everything possible—short of large infusions of money—to bring closer relations, and the Baathists have for the moment chosen to make rapprochement impossible. It is as if disapproval by the United States were necessary to Syria's psychological well-being—or necessary perhaps as a demonstration inside the Arab world of the greater Baathist ability to be independent of the West.

The United Arab Republic

The Arab outreach of the United Arab Republic is considerably greater than that of the Baath, whose activity outside Syria is organized and conducted by small hard-working cells of local Arabs. Nasserite activity outside Egypt—which is sometimes encouraged from U.A.R. embassies but need not be—can be more large-scale and needs less organization to pose a threat. Though Egyptians are often less than popular with other Arabs, Nasser's name (unlike that of any leading Baathist) has political magic, the kind that counts because it does its work in the politically important urban areas of the Arab world. The magic arises because Nasser symbolizes Arab revolution, which means not only radical social change but also freedom from the influence of the West, and his leadership—his ability, above all, to enhance, by the right public words, the Arab self-image and to satisfy, in some measure, the need for outside admiration—is unrivaled. Much more than any other leader, he has "created" patriots: men who are willing to dedicate themselves to, and to sacrifice themselves for, the national good. When he publicly defies a Western power, his popularity shoots upward in Arab capitals, and the most pro-Western Arabs are not immune to the thrill of "telling off" Great Britain or France or the United States. Clearly, conservative Arab governments responsible for educated and urban populations must treat Nasser with the greatest care.



UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC
UPLAND
IRRIGATED NILE PLAIN AND DELTA
OASIS
DEPRESSION
INTERMITTENT STREAM
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MILES
MOROCCO
TUNISIA
ALGERIA
LIBYA
TURKEY
IRAQ
IRAN
SAUDI ARABIA
MUSCAT & OMAN
ADEN PROT.
YEMEN
SUDAN
ETHIOPIA
FR. SOM.
SOMALIA
1 LEBANON
2 ISRAEL
3 JORDAN
4 KUWAIT
5 NEUTRAL TERR.
DAMASCUS
AMMAN
JERUSALEM
GAZA STRIP
ALEXANDRIA
PORT SAID
SUEZ CANAL
SUEZ
CAIRO
SINAI PEN.
AQABA
EL FAIYUM
Qattara Depression
Bahariya Oasis
Farafra Oasis
Dakhla Oasis
Kharga Oasis
NILE R.
ASWAN
RED SEA
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25
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In Egypt, Nasser is not as popular as he is in other Arab states. Egypt's urban population, including the huge bureaucracy, is politically more cynical than any in the Arab world; and on the leader's home ground, the unpleasant corruptions and practicalities of power, less visible from a distance, are easily seen and often privately discussed. Where Syrians have been emotionally uncertain of their political identity, Egyptians—those who are politically aware—are certain of their Egyptianness and are little swayed by talk about Arab unity and a greater Arab nation. What sways them more are food prices, the economic development and social reform of their own valley, freedom of public choice, the standard of living, the prestige of Egypt, and other domestic criteria. The U.A.R.'s economic difficulties—severe overpopulation, lack of natural resources, and unfavorable balance of payments—would spell trouble for any regime, and it is a demonstration of Nasser's political skill that despite shortages and rising food prices he retains a considerable measure of personal popularity. The image he projects in his numerous public appearances, which are usually televised, is that of a sincere and dedicated leader doing his very best to provide justice and to surmount the many obstacles to Egyptian greatness, obstacles arising either from the feudalist-capitalist legacy he inherited in 1952 or from the present-day machinations of imperialist-capitalist powers. His public appearances also serve to instruct the public in the first principles of economics and statecraft, and, most importantly, they provide the basic ingredients for patriotism by developing public concern over public problems and sharing with others the difficulties encountered in the search for solutions.

Though a revolution is under way in the U.A.R., there is little revolutionary fervor. The country's leadership may speak of an upper-case Revolution with great regularity, but the political public—urbanized, hardheaded, and increasing in size—continues to insist that revolution is a lower-case affair that needs results to justify its occurrence. There is no argument about the departure of royalty, the institution of land reform, and the ouster from power of the landlord class: these were changes long overdue. Nor would many of the political public disagree that the modernization of Egypt, including a higher standard of social and economic living, was immediately desirable. Providing the regime's means of achieving these ends bring results, there is a clear willingness to espouse almost any economic system and to put up with considerable political severity—almost anything, in fact, if it will bring economic well-being and international respect. With an economy like that of the U.A.R., however, it is difficult for any regime to do more than stay in place on the treadmill, and the political public—especially its more educated segment—has two major doubts about

present means. (This does not signify a desire for a change of regime: despite disagreements on means, most doubters—most urban Egyptians, for that matter—depend on the regime and have a basic confidence in its dedication and ability vis-à-vis other possible regimes.) Though these doubts are not publicly expressed, the regime is aware of their private circulation; and at times of big decision, many within the regime's top echelon are haunted by doubts of the same sort.

The first of these two major doubts has to do with socialism. Will the regime's socialist methods really bring greater prosperity? As distinct from the doctrinaire varieties, Arab socialism, it is claimed, is pragmatic: it must often adapt itself to society's present circumstances. Historically, Arab socialism has been both a form of social protest and a formula for political consolidation. In the latter capacity, starting in 1958, socialism provided the ideological tool for destroying the power of the big capitalists; but over the years, as general doctrine has emerged from statement after contradictory statement, a number of Egyptian leaders, crucially including Nasser himself, have apparently come to believe that only socialism will bring Egypt's salvation. The firm doctrines are few—land to be privately owned but co-operatively farmed under the direction of the government, dwellings to be privately owned but rent-controlled, commercial and industrial enterprise to be state-controlled (except for the family-sized enterprises, which represent roughly one-quarter of the nation's capital investment) —but the intensity of hopeful belief at the very top is marked. In recent speeches, Nasser has spent considerable time in preaching the importance of the socialist faith, exhorting the people to follow the new religion's tenets despite the admitted temptations of an imperfect and poverty-conscious world, and pleading for the universal discipleship and hard work that would lead to a productive, high-standard prosperity on earth. The question of how many of Nasser's inner circle and of Premier Aly Sabry's cabinet are equally convinced socialists is one of Cairo's better guessing games.

The opinions of economists vary concerning progress along the socialist road to prosperity. The annual increase in population (2.7%) is apparently easier to calculate than the annual increase in the national product, for which estimates from respectable sources range from 3.5% to a full 6%. But even at the lowest estimate, and considering the problems and pressures involved, economists agree that the U.A.R. has done remarkably well. They go on to say, however, that in future years the same increases in national product will be harder to maintain. Then, too, the expectations of the politically aware have unfortunately risen faster than production, and the doubters—these include

some who are old-regime remnants but more who are not—are looking toward South Italy and Greece and asking if there are not quicker roads to prosperity. No one, or almost no one, is advocating a return to the laissez-faire practices of the old regime, but many are asking themselves if private capital should not have a larger and more secure place in the economy. Though the doubters know that private capital formerly showed little inclination to push aggressively ahead with the job of development, they now see the all-devouring bureaucracy stealing into the once-private sector, installing its extra desks and inefficient clerks, and destroying the spirit of public and private enterprise alike. A national debate on socialism would clear the air wonderfully, but this is impossible: looking back at the unhappy feudal past, the regime understandably fears the power of private money and has made it clear that it welcomes criticism only within the framework of socialist belief.

The second major doubt has to do with freedom of public choice. Is a one-party system really necessary and beneficial? Under present political arrangements, this issue has been discussed publicly by very few Egyptians, but one who has done so is Nasser himself—and on several occasions. His principal argument is not unfamiliar: before any nation can indulge itself with political freedom, it must first establish the minimum standard of living necessary to genuine political choice. A Western-style party system in Egypt, he says, would be an absurdity; the party with most money would purchase most votes from the nation's needy majority, and no genuine indication of the people's will would occur—other than the will to keep fed. Economic freedom, Nasser maintains, is the prerequisite to unguided political activity. One trouble with this view in the eyes of many who must live with it is that it coincides neatly—like the confiscatory aspects of socialism—with tighter political control. All media of information are now owned by the government, which in various ways, direct and indirect, determines the outlines of what the public should know. Though there is dissatisfaction with the regime in several quarters, there can be no organized opposition; and as each new decree brings greater centralization, the possibility of opposition becomes more remote. The regime pays careful attention to the nature and substance of public grumbling, and Nasser's speeches that deal with domestic issues will often reflect this, but what is done about the grumbles is imposed from the top and is only indirectly the result of public demand. The Arab Socialist Union, the country's only political organization (which is not called a party), follows the same pattern: the word never comes from below but is handed down in one-way fashion from the presidency to the governorates, and then to the villages and urban districts. The same directions are discernible in the National Assembly: after candidates

are approved by the A.S.U.'s top echelons, they run against other approved candidates and then become members of an assembly whose debates are within limitations carefully determined by an in-group responsible, through the speaker, to the presidency.

With its ears open to public grumbling, however, the regime is concerned to provide greater freedom of public choice—if it safely can. The institution of a parliament is an important example, and, indeed, according to the words of the National Charter adopted in 1962, the National Assembly is meant to be the nation's final political authority. Though it gives approval to all government decrees by means of an elaborate committee-recommendation system, the Assembly is not now a final authority; but there does exist—not only in the Charter but also apparently within the top leadership—a significant presumption that one goal of government is to create the situation in which the concept of public choice can flourish, a history-mindedness that sees as inevitable and good a greater public ability to assume responsibility for national policy. For the moment, the regime is willing to conduct only minor and reversible political experiments. The approval of the Arab Socialist Union, for instance, was given to parliamentary candidates who were local notables rather than supporters of the regime, and many Assembly members, including some from the "peasant and worker" category who legally must constitute half of the membership, freely criticize not policy itself but the execution of policy in some ministries. Significantly, however, the regime is, with increasing eagerness, using the Assembly as a forum to explain policy to the public; and the day when the Assembly no longer belongs to the regime, when it demands an explanation and initiates legislation of its own, is steadily, though very slowly, on its way.

If the regime is monolithic, it is also stable. Nasser's power base is the army, which— showing no sign of the factionalism that bedeviled Syria for so many years—continues, through a sizable group of loyal officers who hold the key military positions, to provide massive and unthinking support. With stability assured, the nation's leaders can afford to experiment; and given their convictions, it is a safe prediction that some form of socialism will continue to guide them. If the present variety fails to show satisfactory results, another can be tried, and failure can always be attributed to the still-incomplete, not-yet-achieved modernization of the Egyptian mentality. The effort to adjust to the people's nonsocialist shortcomings may bring, over the next few years, a number of economic practices that are socialist in name only; one strength of Arab socialism is that the statements about it are vague enough to permit this kind of reinterpretation and adjust-

ment. In the meantime, the government diligently pursues the difficult job of revolution and total education, secure in the conviction that enlightenment is the same as patriotism and loyalty to the regime.

The Sudan

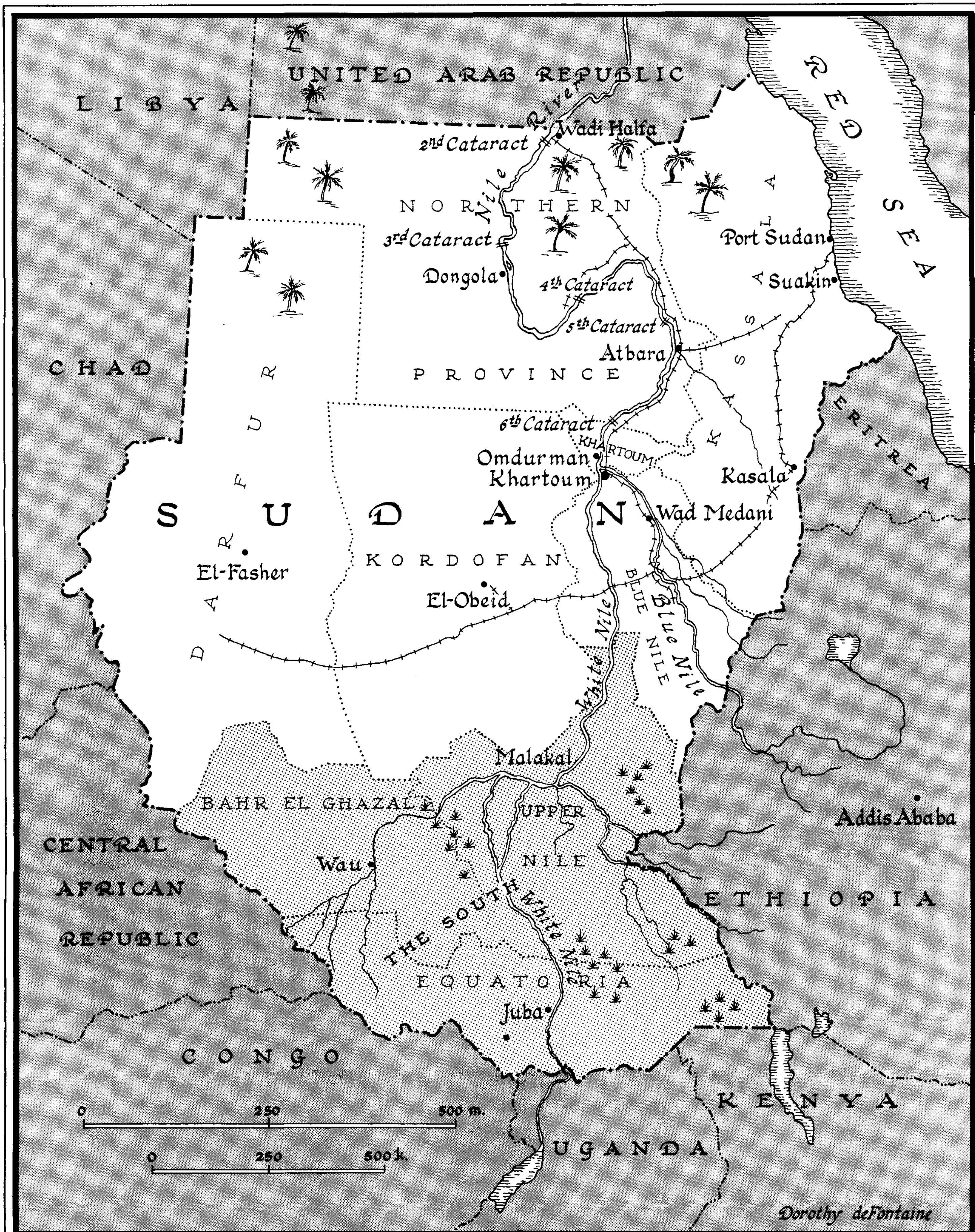
Despite the differences among them, Arab states are recognizably akin to each other, but the Sudan—also an Arab state—is clearly a more distant cousin than most. In the Sudan's dominant north, the language is Arabic and the religion is Islam, but the traveler is aware that he is crossing a cultural and racial bridge to another part of the world. In the South, the three southern provinces which are at still another cultural and racial remove, the traveler is suddenly in Negro Africa.

The recent history of the Sudan contains a quite remarkable series of events, involving the overthrow of a military regime, which the world at large has not yet fully appreciated. These events signify a sharp turn in the course of Sudanese history, an abrupt and astonishing shift that threw the military regime's careful arrangements for "guided" participation in government out of gear.[4] Educated civilians, exasperated with the governmental incompetence of the military and unaware that the army officer corps had become unmonolithic and divided, were faced with sudden opportunity; and most of them, to their everlasting credit, reacted by making a try for more political freedom.

I can give here no more than the story's outlines. Starting with an incident in October 1964, the death of a student at the hands of police who were trying to prevent a public meeting on the campus of the University of Khartoum, a concatenation of unexpected circumstances led, within a week, to negotiations transferring power from the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to a civilian cabinet composed of antimilitarist citizens. The student was shot on Wednesday, October 21, and at the funeral on Thursday there appeared—partly by political design, partly because it was a safe method of expressing indignation and exasperation—a solid core of the nation's professional and intellectual elite. University professors, judges, lawyers, and doctors joined with students in a march from the hospital to another

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[4] See Alan W. Horton, The Social Dimension of Sudanese Politics (AWH-4-'64), American Universities Field Staff Reports, Northeast Africa Series, Volume XI, No. 4, June 1964.


UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC
LIBYA
RED SEA
Nile River
Wadi Halfa
2nd Cataract
NORTHERN
3rd Cataract
Port Sudan
Dongola
4th Cataract
Suakin
5th Cataract
KASSALA
Atbara
CHAD
PROVINCE
DARFUR
ERITREA
6th Cataract
KHARTOUM
Omdurman
Khartoum
Kasala
SUDAN
Wad Medani
El-Fasher
KORDOFAN
El-Obeid
BLUE NILE
Blue Nile
White Nile
Malakal
BAHR EL GHAZAL
UPPER
NILE
Addis Ababa
CENTRAL
AFRICAN
REPUBLIC
Wau
ETHIOPIA
THE SOUTH
White Nile
EQUATORIA
Juba
CONGO
KENYA
0
250
500 m.
0
250
500 k.
UGANDA
Dorothy deFontaine

part of the city; and as the column moved, it grew—until, according to one estimate, it comprised some ten thousand people. The marchers finally came to a halt in a large square, and it was here that two university professors, thinking at first to calm the crowd and send them home, became intoxicated by the moment's drama and suddenly shouted: "Down with General Abboud." Within minutes, the political climate of Khartoum changed to one of apprehensive expectation, and two police cars parked near the edge of the square were overturned and burned. A squad of 90 steel-helmeted police, who were standing close by, made no move to protect the cars, and seeing this, one astute observer said to a friend: "Something has happened—this could be serious." Indeed, the police were suffering from a severe drop in morale. Without the legal approval of a magistrate, they had shot and killed a student; they had already been roasted for their stupidity by the military, and it was obvious that they were going to be roasted for their brutality by all sorts of civilians. On several key occasions over the next few days, they opted out.

After the funeral, resistance was in the air. On Friday, in addition to small and sporadic demonstrations in the three-cities area (Khartoum, Omdurman, and North Khartoum), meetings of various old and new groups violated the afternoon curfew and made plans for wringing concessions from Abboud's Supreme Council. There was still no serious thought of overthrow. In the light of later events, the most significant of these meetings were those of the university professors and the professional associations; the political parties that had held power before the military coup of 1958, principally the Umma and National Union parties, were caught by surprise and were not as important a part of the initial spearhead. On Saturday a group of leading Sudanese, including high court judges, gathered near the presidential palace with the object of presenting a petition; and by dint of an initial refusal to receive the petition and an assault—with tear gas—on the dignity of some highly respected professional men of the petitioning group, the military leadership made its own position much more difficult. Riots, sparked notably by the well-organized Communist party but by other groups as well, began again. A general strike was called by the United National Front, a combination of the professional groupings and the political parties, and on Sunday the strike began to gather steam when civil servants of some of the ministries did not appear for work. By Sunday evening it was clear that the strike would be virtually complete the following day; and on Monday the ministries were closed, laborers were not at work, and in the afternoon, after cool deliberation, the powerful Communist-dominated railroad union joined in and brought communications to an utter standstill. The gauntlet was down, and only

a change of government could now satisfy the civilian elements directing the revolt.

In the meantime, unknown to the insurgents, the army was undergoing severe internal strains. By Monday it had become clear to General Abboud and to his principal ally, Chief of Staff Hasan Basheer, that younger officers were in favor of change and would not "shoot on the people in defense of an unpopular regime." Army elements had been brought in on Sunday to keep order, and there was now no other force standing against chaos. Riots were continuing with greater vigor, and some looting had started. On Monday evening, after a first speech that said little, Abboud announced—to civilian surprise—the dissolution of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces and the willingness of the army, now led by himself and Hasan Basheer, to negotiate with representative civilians concerning the formation of a new cabinet—with an army advisory council to help. This was only partial victory, but the insurgents liked the taste and wanted more. On Tuesday the United National Front presented a National Charter for the consideration of the army, which still thought itself in a reasonably good negotiating position, but by Wednesday afternoon the army was ready to agree to almost anything. What brought surrender was the massacre on Wednesday morning of some 15 demonstrators outside the presidential palace. The officer in charge of the palace perimeter apparently panicked when he saw a new and large group of demonstrators coming from the University, and in the words of an American observer, "the bullets from the armored cars went belly-high into the advancing crowd." In turn, Abboud panicked; he dismissed the unsavory Hasan Basheer and turned negotiations over to less tainted senior officers with instructions to complete the transfer of power under the best possible terms.

The problem now was to select a cabinet. This was a problem that the civilian organizations represented in the United National Front had had little time to consider. The ultimate solution, achieved after many hours of weary negotiation, was to give as much weight to the spearheading professional groups as to the political parties: in other words, each of some dozen organizations received a ministry for its efforts—one for each of the five recognized political parties (including the Moslem Brethren and the Communist party) and one for each of the important professional organizations. This arrangement gave the cabinet a more radical appearance than the strength of the two larger parties, both somewhat conservative, would ordinarily have warranted; but the larger parties had been slow in adjusting to the new situation and the Communist party—which, for want of general member interest, had in some instances worked its way up to positions of influence in the pro-

fessional organizations—had largely carried the key responsibility of organizing the street forces. The prime minister who was finally selected was a political neutral and public servant, Sirr el-Khatem Khalifa, whose job it became to fit the names he was given into what he considered to be the appropriate ministerial slots. Three ministries were reserved for southerners.

The events of October 1964 had a revealing sequel during the month of November. One of the conditions negotiated by the army had been that past military sins would be mostly forgiven. This the happy liberated civilians were certainly prepared to do, but the army, despondent and ruffled, was not yet prepared to forgive itself. The tension between younger and older officers, which had shown itself during the course of events in October, remained; and when the general officers now in charge suddenly announced the dismissal of seven younger officers, some of whom had favored civilian government, the reaction was immediate. The cabinet ordered the arrest of all members (except Abboud himself) of the former Supreme Council, of two senior police officials, and of the former foreign minister, Ahmad Kheir. Under pressure from the younger officers, the cabinet also reviewed the cases of the seven officers who had previously been dismissed—and then a week later, after reinstating four of the officers, agreed to a demand from the younger men that 24 general officers should be promptly retired.

In the meantime, after the arrests, rumors spread rapidly that the army was planning to seize power once again, and on a Monday evening, in the name of the United Professional Front but on the flimsiest authority from that body, a left-leaning member of the Front's executive committee rushed to the radio station in Omdurman and announced dramatically that a military counter-coup was at that moment under way. The response was little short of fantastic. Within a scant 15 minutes, as requested, thousands were gathered at the radio station, and both bridges, connecting Omdurman and North Khartoum with Khartoum, were barricaded by cars with deflated tires. Benches were turned into ramparts; sticks became weapons. The speed with which citizens collected and acted suggests organization and patriotism of a high order. The refreshing fact is that citizens of all kinds—rich and poor, conservative and Communist—were prepared to die in the defense of political freedom, and the later evidence that the rumors of an army take-over were completely unfounded was almost a disappointment. If the events of Monday night were meant as a demonstration of Communist control of the street forces, as some observers believe, the orderly march on Tuesday of some ten thousand Ansār, members

of the religious brotherhood that stands behind the conservative Umma party, was an impressive counterdemonstration and a careful reminder of the power of tradition.

The Sudan's great social problem, with which the military government, obtuse and inept, had no success, is the problem of the South. Though the new regime's prime minister and others have, from the beginning, spent a great deal of time trying to find responsible southerners with whom greater autonomy might be negotiated, the South remained for them a secondary political consideration—that is, until December 1964, when suddenly the ugly smell of race hatred pervaded the three cities and shocked responsible northerners into the tardy realization that the problem was primary.

It started on a Sunday afternoon. Thousands of southerners resident in the Khartoum area went to the airport to greet the southerner who had been appointed minister of the interior in the new cabinet. He was returning from a trip to the South, but his plane was delayed and rumors began to circulate. Despite the efforts of southern leaders, the crowd became a mob and surged into Khartoum, smashing windows, burning cars, and even killing a few people. During the two days that followed, some members of the northern majority retaliated by hunting down southerners and killing them: the official estimate of southern dead was less than 50, but unofficial estimates of reasonable reliability run higher than 300. At the request of the Southern Front, the organization managing the Khartoum end of southern affairs, southerners were brought to the Omdurman football stadium to be protected until passions were spent. When the Southern Front claimed that the government had done little to control the situation, many leading northerners agreed; but they also realized the transition cabinet was essentially inactivist —without a mandate. It was responsible to nobody, and its prime minister presided with no real power over his ministers.

The reaction came in February 1965. As the memory of the events of October became less revered, the country's conservatives, preponderant and restless, began to insist on changes in the structure of the cabinet. The October agreement among the insurgents had called for elections within six months, but the urban radicals, Communists, and others who stood to lose in any election, were arguing with some success that elections should be postponed because the turbulent South was clearly unprepared. The response of the Umma party was to assemble the Ansār, once again some ten thousand strong, and to demand that henceforth only political parties, not professional groups, should have representation in the cabinet. After some critical moments, the

demand was met: the prime minister dismissed his cabinet and selected a new one from lists submitted by each party. At Umma insistence, the two lesser parties—Communists and Moslem Brethren—were offered one ministry each; the other parties—Umma, National Union (NUP), and People's Democratic (PDP)—were each offered three; and the South retained the ministries it had held in the previous cabinet. The PDP and the Communist party, in some indignation at the highhandedness of the Umma, at first refused cabinet offers; but when the posts were kept open for them, they finally agreed, after a month had passed, to provide the prime minister with selection lists. Surprisingly, the elections came off on schedule—with seats left vacant for eventual representation from the leaderless and increasingly chaotic South—and the conservative shape of the future became visible.

The transition cabinet has now resigned and a coalition government of the Umma and the NUP, neither of which has an absolute majority in the Constituent Assembly, is in power. A senior member of the Umma party, which elected most representatives, is prime minister, and he may or may not be the man to handle the two main problems outstanding: namely, the worsening situation in the South and the generally worsening economic situation caused by the over-all unproductiveness and government inactivity of the transition period. The constitution that will eventually emerge from the Assembly's deliberations will probably call for both a president and a prime minister—the Umma is known to favor this—but it is too soon to foretell much else. The army, which has re-established the principle of seniority among its officers, has apparently forgotten its shame and is raising its head once again. One troubling matter is the lack of a middle-of-the-road political focus: the Umma must always pay heed to its tradition-minded supporters; the NUP shows few signs of reasserting its pre-1958 liberalism; and the PDP—having been pro-Egyptian, a posture that now attracts little political interest—is near extinction. What remains is the Communist party, and at this writing there is no political home for the modernizing young liberals who will inevitably, under one banner or another, inherit political power.

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SUGGESTED READINGS

ON SYRIA, THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC, AND THE SUDAN

A READING LIST OF AUFS REPORTS ON SYRIA, THE UNITED ARAB REPUBLIC, AND THE SUDAN

[Charles F. Gallagher's A Note on the Arab World, listed below, is especially recommended. An interpretive essay synthesizing ethnology, history, geography, and political development, this Report remains invaluable in providing a perspective from which to view Syria, the United Arab Republic, and the Sudan, in relation to other Arab states. It also includes a well-chosen bibliography suggested for further reading of a general nature on Arab affairs.]

CFG-6-'61 Aug. 1961	A NOTE ON THE ARAB WORLD An interpretive essay synthesizing ethnology, history, geography, and political development. (32 pp.)
AWH-2-'62 April 1962	THE CENTRAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEM OF THE UAR Part I: The Rural Element (10 pp.)
AWH-3-'62 May 1962	THE CENTRAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEM OF THE UAR Part II: The Urban Mosaic (9 pp.)
AWH-4-'62 June 1962	THE CENTRAL SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEM OF THE UAR Part III: The Search for Popular Support (12 pp.)
AWH-5-'62 July 1962	THE CHARTER FOR NATIONAL ACTION OF THE UAR A résumé of the complete document. (20 pp.)
CFG-3-'63 March 1963	REVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION IN THE ARAB WORLD (11 pp.)
AWH-1-'64 Feb. 1964	THE ARAB SUMMIT OF JANUARY 1964 Some observations on inter-Arab relations. (18 pp.)
AWH-2-'64 March 1964	THE EGYPTIAN NUBIANS Some information on their ethnography and resettlement. (20 pp.)
AWH-3-'64 June 1964	THE "SPLENDID ISOLATION" OF THE SUDAN An Arab-speaking country holds itself aloof—even from the Arab world. (10 pp.)

AWH-4-'64 June 1964	THE SOCIAL DIMENSION OF SUDANESE POLITICS Some tribal and elite pressures on the Sudan's political structure. (14 pp.)
AWH-5-'64 Dec. 1964	THE LAST PASHA An Egyptian in transition. (14 pp.)
AWH-6-'64 Dec. 1964	THE OMDA'S BOY An Egyptian in transition. (12 pp.)
AWH-1-'65 April 1965	SYRIAN STABILITY AND THE BAATH A new look at the structure of power in Syria. (12 pp.)

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